

# **“Pastoral Ministry in a Missionary Key”**

## **A White Paper: The Archdiocese of Seattle Strategic Pastoral Planning Project**

Archbishop Sartain has initiated a visioning and planning process for the Archdiocese of Seattle to respond to Pope Francis’ call in *Evangelii Gaudium* for a new missionary impulse that will touch all levels of the Church, from the individual believer to the Pope himself. In his vision statement introducing the planning process, the Archbishop spoke of our trust in God’s providence as we move into the future and emphasized the need to maximize the pastoral and spiritual care of the people of God.

In calling for a new evangelization, Pope Francis warned against simply naming goals for the very necessary “pastoral ministry in a missionary key.” In his words, “The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.” In keeping with this call and the long tradition of lay consultative councils in the Archdiocese, this new effort will involve the development of either an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council or an Archdiocesan Synod that will permit wide participation in and commitment to evangelization. The ultimate goal is clear: “All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.”<sup>1</sup>

An initial phase of the larger visioning process has already been launched: a deanery and parish planning process to address the location of parishes and the distribution and assignment of priests to parishes. These questions have taken on increased urgency as the population in Western Washington continues to grow more complex, pastoral needs change, and the number of priests available for service in our parishes remains limited. The general outline for this phase of the diocesan process was affirmed at the October 2014 meeting of the Presbyteral Council and a November 2014 meeting of the entire Presbyterate and Parish Life Coordinators.<sup>2</sup>

### **THE DISTRIBUTION OF PARISHES AND PRIESTS**

There is an unequal distribution of spiritual, human and financial resources across the Archdiocese which has led to increasing calls by pastors and parish councils for a fresh look at how the Archdiocese serves the diverse needs of Catholics throughout the region with a limited number of priests. The Catholic parish is the primary way in which individual Catholics experience the Church and through which the Church reaches out to the People of God. As Pope Francis writes, “The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.” Each parish is a unique community with a history and a vision that are a part of

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium*. USCCB, 2013. Chapter 1, II, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> The vision and principles for the planning process, approved at the 2014 meetings, are provided in the Appendix.

the larger history and vision of the Church in the Archdiocese, in the nation and in the world.

The seeds for this first phase can be found in the reflections and recommendations of five Archdiocesan Pastoral Councils (APCs) since 1978. These councils were a lived example of Pope Francis' current call for "a wise and realistic pastoral discernment". Each of the councils was composed of men and women from all parts of the Archdiocese and with a variety of racial, ethnic, economic and educational backgrounds. The members of each APC held listening sessions throughout the Archdiocese and commissioned research into the most pressing needs and priorities of Catholics in Western Washington. At the end of two to three years of study, each APC produced a vision statement containing specific priorities and goals for following years and these statements, in turn, led to major changes in many areas, including Catholic schools, religious education and formation, and outreach to multicultural communities.

Members of each of the Councils recognized (often with surprise) that the Archdiocese is both large and diverse but that resources are not equally available across the diocese. The most recent APC was particularly clear about the need to address the perceived imbalance in resources: "Throughout its discussions and listening sessions, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council heard the call for greater equity of resources among parishes, including the consolidation, centralization and sharing of resources: spiritual, human and financial."<sup>3</sup> In light of this understanding, the council members encouraged the Archdiocese to "Foster policies, systems and programs that provide for an equitable distribution of resources and services among all parishes and faith communities in the Archdiocese."<sup>4</sup>

Many older Catholics remember when a typical parish in the Archdiocese might have two or more priests in residence responsible, with communities of women religious, for most aspects of parish life. Over the past decades, however, the number of priests available for service in the parishes has dropped significantly and the number of women religious has decreased even more. At the same time, the Catholic population in Western Washington has grown in size, become more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and language and spread out from the central cities to suburbs or small towns, many of which have themselves grown into large cities. To meet the need for pastoral services in these growing areas, new parishes have been established.

In 1980 there were 130 parishes and 35 missions in the Archdiocese served by 130 pastors assisted by 74 parochial vicars. There are currently 146 parishes and 27 missions served by 111 pastors assisted by 49 parochial vicars. While the numbers of parishes and priests have changed, the Archbishop has remained committed to the ideal of supporting all existing parishes, building new parishes in growing areas, and providing priestly ministry in every parish. However, the task of assigning fewer priests to more parishes serving larger numbers of Catholics has become increasingly difficult.

If the parishes in the Archdiocese of Seattle are to continue being central to worship and service for Catholics, if they are to be the communities in which Catholics participate in the larger visioning process and from which they will be called to the new evangelization, action must be taken now. The Eucharist and the other sacraments are central to the life of the church, so priestly ministry in parish communities is extremely important. As a result, the first phase of the planning process will call on deaneries and parishes to look closely at the best ways to organize, to share and to support the priestly ministry that serves the parishes and Catholic people of Western Washington.

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<sup>3</sup> Most Reverent Alexander J. Brunett. *A Future Full of Hope: Vision, Priorities, and Goals for the Archdiocese of Seattle, 2004-2009*. P. 39, #99.

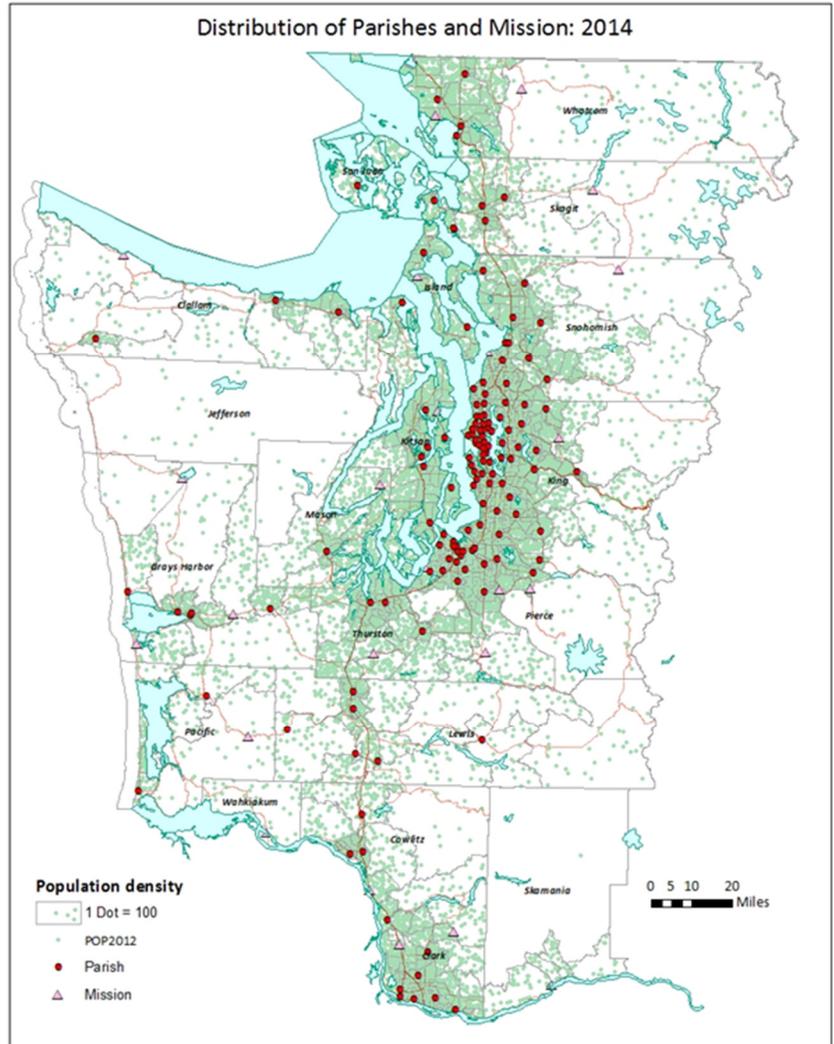
<sup>4</sup> *A Future Full of Hope*, p. 41, #105.

## THE DIMENSIONS OF THE CHALLENGE

Numbers will necessarily play a role in addressing these challenges, but the numbers—whether of priests, church locations, registered Catholics, Mass attendance, church capacity, infant baptisms or ordinations—can only set a context for discernment. They cannot provide the answers. The context for discussion in this first phase of the process concerns both supply (the number of priests available to serve in parishes of the Archdiocese) and demand (the number of Catholics in the Archdiocese and the parish and mission churches in which they gather) over the 29,000 square miles covered by the Archdiocese. The map gives an overview of the extent of the Archdiocese, the distribution of the general population, and the location of parishes and mission.

The Archdiocese is divided into 10 geographic deaneries.

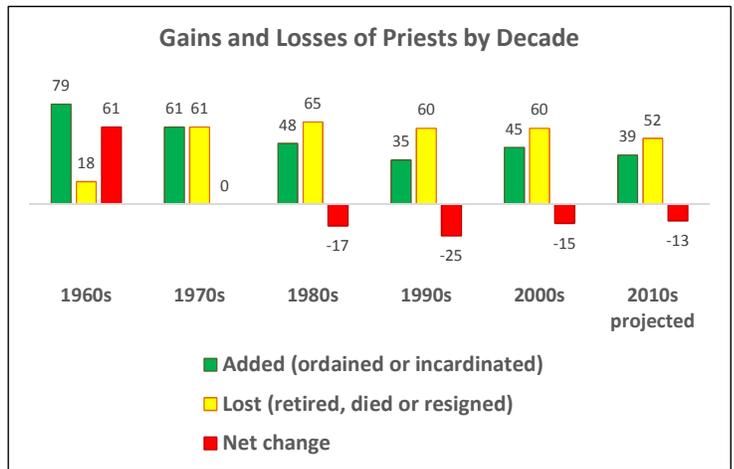
- Over 58% of all parishes in the Archdiocese are located in the five Deaneries in King and Pierce counties that together are home to just under half of the estimated Catholics in the Archdiocese. These two counties and five deaneries cover about 15% of the 28,731 square miles within Archdiocesan boundaries.
- Just over 33% of all parishes in the Archdiocese are located in the two deaneries within the City of Seattle where approximately 25% of the estimated Catholics are concentrated on 6% of the total square miles of the Archdiocese.
- At the other end of the spectrum, two deaneries cover eight counties: Olympic Deanery, made up of Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason counties and South Sound Deanery, made up of Grays Harbor, Lewis, Thurston, Pacific counties. These deaneries have 18% of all parishes that serve about 23% of the estimated Catholics in the Archdiocese spread across 44% of the square miles covered by the Archdiocese.
- The average miles between contiguous parishes in the Seattle and Pierce deaneries is 3.4 miles. In contrast, the average distance between parishes and missions in the Olympic Deanery is 16.4 miles and the greatest distance between neighboring parishes is over 56 miles. In the South Sound Deanery, the average distance between contiguous parishes is 15.4 miles and the greatest distance between neighboring parishes is 46 miles.



In short, deaneries differ in size, in population and in human and material resources. In some deaneries the loss of a priest in a parish would mean Catholics would have to drive a mile or so further to attend Mass, while in others the loss of a priest would add more than a dozen miles and up to an hour to the trip to attend Mass. In a few deaneries, most parishes are largely independent of each other, each with its own pastor, staff and programs; in others, a majority of parishes are clustered with 2 to 5 other parishes and missions or share a pastor (and sometimes staff) with one or more other parishes.

Most Catholics are aware of the fact that the number of Catholic priests has declined over the past 30 or more years. The Archdiocese of Seattle has always been a missionary diocese, encouraging priestly vocations from within and relying on priests from outside our borders. In the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, foreign-born Irish priests supplemented the ranks of native born priests and, in 1985, made up 28% of available priests for parish and diocesan service. In more recent years, extern priests from Africa, the Philippines, Korea, Southeast Asia and elsewhere have served Archdiocesan parishes and some have been incardinated<sup>5</sup> in the diocese.

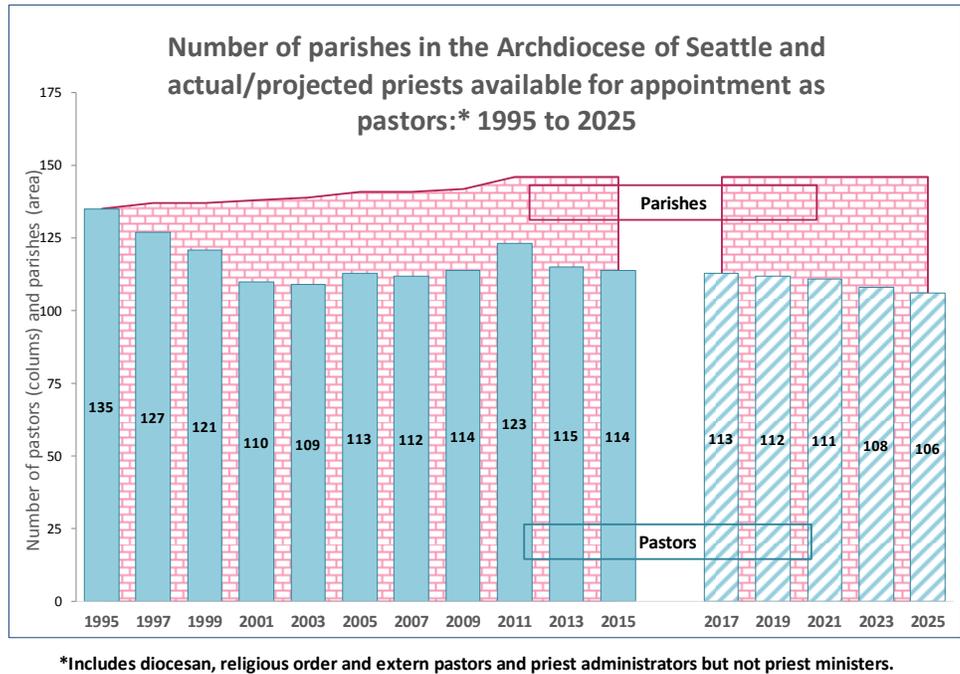
There were a significant number of ordinations and incardinations in the 1960s and 1970s at a time when there were relatively few losses of priests to retirement, death or resignation. When the large ordination classes of those and earlier years began retiring, dying or leaving the priesthood in the 1980s and later, the Archdiocese faced an increasingly difficult challenge. Quite simply, new ordinations and incardinations from outside the Archdiocese did not balance the numbers of priests leaving active service. The figure to the right provides a graphic picture of these changes.



By the grace of God and the hard work and generosity of bishops, priests, and people, the decrease in the numbers of potential priest pastors slowed around the year 2000 and is now moving towards projected stability—a balance between gains and losses, but still at numbers below what are necessary to assign a priest pastor to each of the 146 parishes in the Archdiocese.

<sup>5</sup> Acceptance by the Archbishop, for permanent service in Seattle, of priests who were ordained in another diocese or country or as members of a religious order,

The number of priests is likely to stabilize, but not every priest is equipped by personal skill or training to accept an assignment as pastor or parish administrator. In addition, newly ordained priests and externs seeking to join the Archdiocese typically need to serve as parochial vicars in parishes for one or more years before taking on a pastorate. Thus, there will always be some priests who are able to provide high quality pastoral and sacramental ministry in parishes without being the pastor. The figure below displays only those priests (whether diocesan, extern or religious order) who served or will serve as pastors compared to the number of parishes now in the Archdiocese. Over the period of time shown, the number of parishes grew from 135 to 146 as new parishes have been established. At the same time, the number of priests assigned as pastors has dropped from 135 to 114 (currently) with an anticipated drop to 108 by 2025. Thus, the gap between parishes and priest pastors is large (32 in 2015) and expected to grow larger (to perhaps 40 by 2025).



## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

In the past few years the dioceses of New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago, and Boston, among others, have made headlines by closing or merging dozens, even hundreds of parishes. These East Coast and Midwestern dioceses had originally established large numbers of churches that served subgroups of Catholics by language or ethnicity. As populations shifted and dropped and numbers of priests decreased, bishops and their consultative bodies attempted to establish a balance between the number of church buildings and the decreasing supply of priests to serve them. As is clear from the headlines, the balancing process in many of these dioceses consisted primarily of closing or merging large numbers of long-standing parish communities.

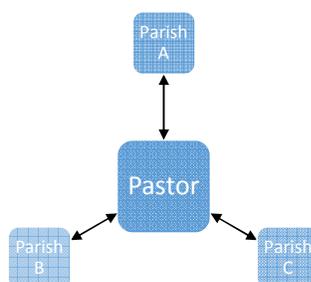
While both newer and smaller than the dioceses that have garnered media attention for closing parishes, the Archdiocese of Seattle shares with them the need to make hard decisions in light of the number of priests available to serve its parishes. The Priest Placement Board that is responsible for recommending placements to the Archbishop has had an increasingly difficult task when a parish has lost its pastor due to retirement, illness, death or resignation. The Board has done the best job it could to make sure that Catholics in that parish continue to have the opportunity to worship, to receive the sacraments, and to grow in faith and service. The job has been made more difficult by the fact that there

isn't a comprehensive plan for the diocese and there are few supports in place for parishes and priests who suddenly face a new leadership structure. The stop-gap measures that have had to be taken to fill vacancies have sometimes had unintended consequences that negatively affected both the people in the parish and the priests assigned to serve them. For example, parishes were sometimes clustered without adequate analysis of the resources and challenges of the individual parishes, leaving parishioners with little understanding of the rationale for the change and little motivation to make the sacrifices necessary for the continuing life of the clustered parishes. Some priests with responsibility for several parishes experienced burnout as they tried to coordinate existing staff members, conflicting Mass schedules, multiple consultative councils/commissions, and more than one struggling Catholic school. A few parishes experienced multiple pastoral transitions in the space of a year or two, leading to confusion among parishioners and, in many cases, decreased attendance and financial support. Parishes that are clustered need an analysis of resources and challenges so parishioners will understand the rationale for the change. A plan would also provide adequate support for priests with responsibility for several parishes.

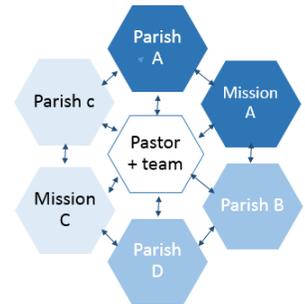
The goal of the Phase 1 planning process is to develop a master plan of recommended parish leadership structures for all parishes within a deanery so that future decisions on priest placement can most effectively meet the needs of both the people and the priests in the Archdiocese. During the consultation process, each deanery is asked to look at all parishes and missions within its territory and review both their history and their current leadership structures, seeking to identify the best way in which to retain the spirit of the parish and assure that the parishioners and priests who serve them have the preparation they need to succeed in whatever configuration is recommended. This might lead to some currently clustered parishes being separated and/or linked to different parishes. In all cases, the culture and history of each parish in a deanery will be considered in determining what model would work best. , just as the skills and experience of each priest will be considered by the Priest Personnel Board in order to determine whether he would be able to serve effectively and happily within a given model.

In an effort to consider parish closures only as a last resort, The Archdiocese of Seattle has developed several plans for parish reorganization. There are four basic models that will be considered, plus a last resort option.

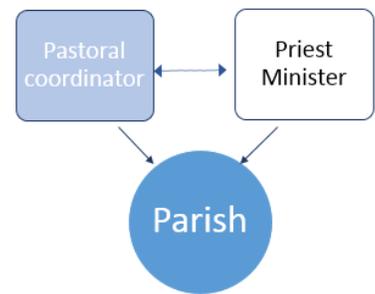
1. Assign a single pastor with responsibility for two or more parishes (and their affiliated missions, if any) with each parish operating independently: separate staffs, programs, Mass schedules and consultative councils. When possible, a parochial vicar or parish priest will be assigned to assist. There are several examples of such arrangements in the Archdiocese now and this was a common way to continue providing pastoral care for parishes-



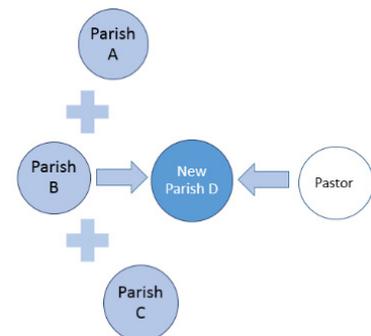
- Link three or more parishes into a collaborative (sometimes called a cluster) with a single pastor and two or more priests as part of a pastoral team. Although each parish retains its name and specific mission statement, some functions of the parish are shared across all parishes: Mass schedules are coordinated; parish staff may be shared; there is one parish council made up of members from each of the parishes; all parishes contribute to the support of the pastoral team and staff of the collaborative. There was a single cluster/collaboratives in the Archdiocese in 1970, and a few more were added in 1990 and later. The pastor, as leader of the pastoral team, has something of the role of a bishop, coordinating assignments and looking out for the good of all of the parishes, and this role requires an exceptional amount of energy and flexibility and prayer.



- Assign a Pastoral Coordinator (PC)<sup>6</sup> to the parish, in cooperation with a priest who serves the sacramental and pastoral needs of parishioners and who may be a senior priest, have other diocesan responsibilities, or for other reasons isn't able to serve as pastor. As is true for priests, lay people or deacons trained for and experienced with parish administration are in short supply. However, a number of parishes are currently staffed in this way and have shown how this model can work effectively when there is adequate preparation for parishioners and a good relationship among the pastoral leaders (PC, priest(s) and other staff members) in the parish.



- Merge two or more parishes that are close to each other into a single large parish to form a new parish community in one of the existing parish campuses, either retaining the name of that parish or choosing a new one. The new parish would have a single pastor, possibly assisted by other priests, with the parish leadership of the resulting merger challenged to blend the communities and traditions of the contributing parishes into a single community. At least during the preparation and initial years of the new parish, this could be a significant challenge, especially if the contributing parishes each sponsor a school or other specialized ministries. For some in the original parishes, this merger might be experienced as the death of their parish, with all the attendant mourning and adjustment.



- As a last resort, close<sup>7</sup> one or more parishes, inviting parishioners to join a neighboring parish. This was the option chosen by a number of large East coast and Midwestern dioceses, but it can be experienced as a death by members of the parish and by the neighborhood in which it is located- 5/19/2016

<sup>6</sup> Lay person or deacon who acts as day-to-day administrator of the parish, supervising staff, overseeing the budget and managing schedules and facilities with other staff.

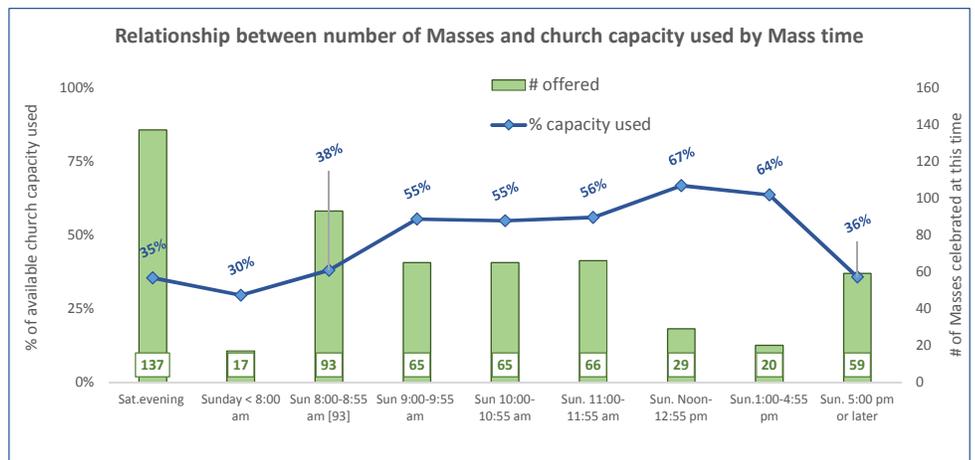
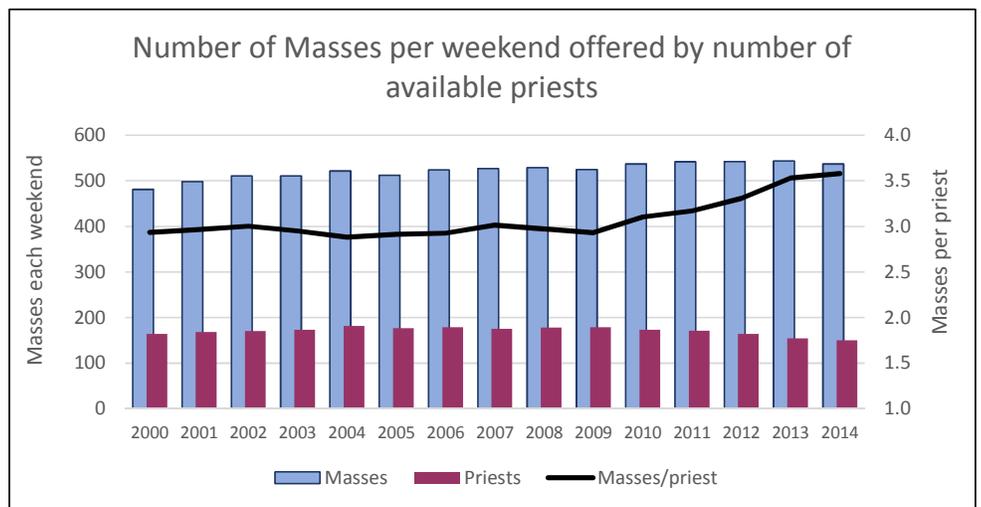
<sup>7</sup> A closed parish may become the station of another parish but would no longer provide the range of sacramental and pastoral services required of a parish.

The long-term solution to the challenges faced by the Archdiocese is increased priestly vocations as the fruit of prayer, invitation and support. This effort has been underway for several years now and a growing number of seminarians for the Archdiocese is the result. However, the selection and training of candidates for the priesthood requires many years. Steps must be taken now to make sure that both the Catholics in the Archdiocese and their pastors have the resources they need to grow in their faith, minister to others and take part in the new evangelization.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

All parishes and deaneries, as part of the Archdiocese, will be affected in some way by the planning process, but some deaneries will be affected more than others. As the distribution of priests and parishes now exists, the loss of a priest in some deaneries would mean the loss of a parish, and in effect, would mean the loss of access to the sacraments for Catholics in the area. For example, in the Northern, South Sound, Southern and Olympic Deaneries there are priests who now travel from 80 to 150 miles round trip each weekend to say Mass in the parishes for which they have responsibility. In contrast, the loss of a priest in other deaneries, with more and closer parishes, would not necessitate the closing of a parish or loss of access to the sacraments for parishioners. North Seattle, South Seattle and Pierce Deaneries, with proportionately more priests and parishes than other deaneries, are each projected to have three to four fewer priests available to serve in their parishes by 2020 than they do now. These are the deaneries that will be affected first and most directly.

In order to assure that sacraments are available to all Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seattle, most deaneries and parishes will be affected soon by changes in Mass schedules. Research conducted in preparation for the overall planning process revealed that the number of Masses scheduled per weekend has increased 13% over the past 15 years while the number of diocesan, religious order and extern priests (including those without a parish assignment) available to celebrate Mass has dropped by over 6%. The average number of Masses celebrated per priest has been above the canonical limit of 3 for several years,



but there are a significant number of priests in the Archdiocese who offer as many as 5 or 6 Masses per weekend, depending on the parish(es) to which they are assigned, while others may say only one or two.

One of the major reasons why deaneries and parishes will be examining Mass times is that current schedules may not make the best use of both priests and church buildings. For example, the vast majority of parishes in the Archdiocese offer a Saturday evening vigil Mass (137 such Masses), but on average only slightly more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of available church capacity is used (i.e., seats filled) on Saturday evening. Early morning Sunday Masses (starting at or before 8:45) are also common (a total of 110 across the Archdiocese) and, again, only slightly more than a third of the seats are filled. Coordination of Mass times and elimination of duplicated Masses among linked parishes (whether in a formal collaborative/cluster or in a more informal relationship) would free priests to assist other parishes without adequate Masses and permit them to be fully and prayerfully present at the remaining (and better attended) Masses. Changing Mass schedules will need to be a collaborative effort that will invite members of the affected Mass communities to participate in the transition through prayer, dialogue, welcoming events, and visible improvements in the quality of the liturgies that will be offered. The Archdiocese and the deaneries, in turn, will support parishes by providing guidance, facilitation and a method to inform Catholics of the times of weekend Masses near their homes or places of travel.

Another issue for coordination among parishes is the timing of daily Masses. In 2014, almost all parishes and missions (169) scheduled at least one daily Mass during the week for a total of 454 Masses per week in English and 83 in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean or Latin. Given that few parishes have more than one priest available to say daily Mass, most parishes schedule only one Mass a day. Unfortunately, as with the weekend Masses, there has been little collaboration among parishes to schedule Masses at times available to the range of Mass goers. For example, there are at present very few daily Masses that are celebrated before 8:00 a.m. and there are very few daily Masses in the evening after the typical working day, so working people have a difficult time finding a Mass before or after work. Most daily Masses are offered between 9:00 and noon, times that are convenient for schools and people who do not work away from home. Coordinating daily Mass times within a geographic area and a smartphone app to locate daily Masses could provide opportunities for more Catholics to attend a daily Mass, even if not in their home parish.

## **A TIMELINE FOR THE PHASE I PLANNING PROCESS**

All deaneries have begun discussing the challenges and options involved in the planning process and some have scheduled convocations of parish leadership and others affected by the process. Because this first phase focuses primarily on the structural challenges of the parishes, it is purposely intended to take from 6 to 8 months, with recommendations expected to be sent to the Presbyteral Council and the Archbishop in the spring of 2016. However, implementation of specific plans for a parish or group of parishes (e.g., merging parishes, forming a cluster) will take place only when a pastoral change in the affected parishes is necessary because of the loss of the current pastor or priests. A more extensive pastoral planning effort, involving extensive consultation with laity and staff, will be launched when the parish-level plans are in place, recognizing that some of these plans will not be put into action for months or years.

## **SUPPORT FOR PARISHES FACING TRANSITIONS/CHANGES**

Facilitation services and support materials will be available to parishes and deaneries at several stages in the planning and implementation phases of the project. The Archdiocese is contracting with the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) to provide trained staff to help deanery and parish leadership identify possible models for parish collaboration and to assist with implementation. CLI will also provide training of priests, parish staff, members of parish consultative bodies and parishioners when changes are scheduled to occur.

Critical to the success of both the planning and implementation phases will be the provision of resources to those affected: models, case studies and accounts of best practices in the face of new challenges and help in adopting them. There are many questions that will have to be asked: How can three small linked rural parishes provide the full range of religious education/formation opportunities with a single priests and a limited budget? In a collaborative of two urban parishes, should there be two sets of consultative groups or can there be a single merged commission? Can four parishes sponsor a single RCIA process that revolves among the parishes during Lent, or should they retain their own programs? If a parish loses its Saturday vigil Mass, what happens to the money contributed by parishioners who now go to the neighboring parish for the vigil? If a single parish in a collaborative sponsors a Catholic school, should the other parishes become co-sponsors? What if all the parishes sponsor Catholic schools? All Archdiocesan offices will need to be involved in identifying models and other resources in their area of responsibility for parishes involved in the planning process. Central support and services will be critical when leadership models are changing.

The goal throughout is for each parish in the Archdiocese to be vital and welcoming. Parishes are calling for practical tools for assessing their vitality/effectiveness. In response, the Presbyteral Council and individual deaneries have suggested indices for parish viability that would identify essential elements of parish life and service and establish criteria for accountability. Work will continue on these indices throughout the planning process.

## APPENDIX

### Archbishop's Vision for Pastoral Planning (Presbyteral Council Meeting 10/14/14)

1. The Mission of the Archdiocese of Seattle is EVANGELIZATION
2. We trust in GOD because this is the Lord's work and we will move joyfully and hopefully into the future
2. Concerns about the priest's workload
3. Uniformity in implementation of the plan is important
4. Role of the laity is important with a common ecclesiology that includes norms for formation
5. Statistics don't tell the whole story
6. Archbishop is leading this process with the help of the Planning Office and The Vicar for Clergy Office (local resources will better serve our people)
7. Priority still exists to promote priestly vocations; this is a given
8. This process should inform the formation of the new class of deacons; the new class of deacons are part of the process that will best serve our parishes and pastoral needs
9. Be careful that we don't create a self-fulfilling prophecy with the expectation of decreasing number of vocations but continue to promote vocations and remain hopeful
10. Preference in an ideal situation would be to have a resident priest pastor in every parish, but since this is not currently possible we will come up with the best plan to provide quality pastoral care
11. We need to look at the number of the Masses that are needed according to capacity rather than the number of Masses currently offered
12. We can't just focus on the present; we have to look to the future.
13. We need to talk about emergency or other needs for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, e.g., if a priest cannot find a replacement, he should still go on vacation and could use SCAP during his absence.
14. We should explore the benefits of priests living in community if they desire and serving in different parishes.
15. A new Archdiocesan Pastoral Council will be formed in the future.
16. Pastoral and spiritual care of the People of God is of utmost importance.

### PRINCIPLES FOR THE PASTORAL PLANNING PROCESS

1. One priest present and consistent for each parish; priest may not be the pastor.
2. Current status of parish/mission/station could change.
3. Anything we do to change a parish/mission/station can be reversed.
4. A priest will only have to say ~ 4 Saturday vigil/Sunday Masses.
5. Maximize effective pastoral and spiritual care of the people of God.
6. Whole health care (mental, physical, spiritual) of each priest
7. Look into viability of laity taking on additional responsibilities (e.g." volunteers, consultative leadership, stewardship, etc.)
8. No one model for the entire archdiocese; not every deanery will be impacted in the same way
9. Organizational continuity, i.e. once the new plan is in place it is not affected by change of assignment of new priests